

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS ABUJA 001559

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

BRUSSELS, DAKAR, DOT FOR FAA

E.O. 12598: N/A

TAGS: [FAIR](#) [EINV](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#) [ETRA](#)

SUBJECT: Continental Airlines to Fly to Nigeria?

1. (U) This is an action message. See paragraph 7.
2. (U) Ambassador, EconCouns and Econoff met with Chris Amenechi of Continental Airlines and Continental's Nigerian law firm, George Etomi & Partners, on September 7 at the Ambassador's office. Amenechi provided documents to the Ambassador confirming Continental's U.S. authorization to operate regularly scheduled service between Lagos, Nigeria and the United States during two years (docket OST-2004-18874).
3. (SBU) Amenechi said the next step should be the Ambassador's support of its application with the Nigerian authorities to conduct such flights by April 2005. Continental suggests that the Ambassador seek an appointment for Continental's senior leadership with President Obasanjo, at which the Ambassador might be present. Following this high-level attention and the President's support, Continental would then pursue the matter at the working level at the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Aviation. Continental hopes to receive GON approval soonest and begin operating on a daily basis in April 2005.
4. (SBU) Ambassador noted the need for us to first receive instructions from the Department of State before we make a demarche to the Foreign Ministry. Amenechi replied that such instructions would be cabled to the Embassy without delay. Following consultations with the Department, the Embassy would make representations on behalf of Continental, the Ambassador said.
5. (SBU) Some discussion ensued whether Continental's right to fly between Lagos and the United States, and Virgin Eagle's announcement that it would soon be offering such service, might become linked in the minds of GON officials. Ambassador and EconCouns noted this is possible, given that the new Nigerian carrier's technical partner is Virgin Atlantic. As noted in septels, given the state of the U.S.-UK bilateral civil air relationship, it is highly unlikely that the new Nigerian carrier, effectively operated by Virgin Atlantic, will be allowed to land in the United States in the foreseeable future.
6. (U) Amenechi and his lawyers countered by saying that Obasanjo is so keen about gaining U.S. investment that he will not establish such a linkage; to the contrary, he is likely to champion Continental's cause, they said. Continental estimates it will initially invest \$3 million in Nigeria and spend \$22 to \$23 million annually on operating costs.
7. (SBU) Action requested: We request Department guidance on whether to plead Continental's case at senior level, preferably (per Continental's request) at Presidential level at this time. Please also send us notice that Continental Airlines is a U.S. designated carrier for purposes of flights between the United States and Nigeria, in keeping with our Open Skies agreement.

Campbell